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nintendo 

e-Zine

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Exclusive Interview With
the Legendary
Howard Phillips!!



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CULTIVATING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH STORE OWNERS FOR FUN, FRIENDS, AND PROFIT!

By: Cole20200

The unfortunate truth is that the days of abundant vintage games in the wild are numbered. The garage sale stock has mostly been sold, and reselling shops like flea markets, pawnshops, goodwill, and specialty game shops are getting wise to the true value and rarity of many classic games. This year, we've seen a more the 40% across-the-board rise in NES cartridge values alone.

If this trend continues, it won't be long before the majority of games reach their original sale values again. And once that happens, the gloves are gonna come off in the collecting arena. But how can you keep local sources flowing? Should you play the part of the invisible ghost, secretly checking inventory against your collection notes and rarity lists? Or maybe you can play the dumb

enthusiast at the flea market and pretend to be only half interested in that Bubble Bobble 2 cart when secretly you mean to buy up the whole stock. There is a third

approach however, one that may seem so obvious it can't possibly work, the role of the well informed hardcore collector. Let's explore these approaches, and weigh their pros and cons.

The first, silent hunter, may seem like it's the best choice off the cuff, allowing you to slip unnoticed through someone's booth, quickly evaluating the available stock, and making your selections without indicating you know what they are really worth. This can be good for pawn shops and larger poorly informed resellers. But it's dependent on how much knowledge you yourself have, of your own collection, and of general values. However, minimizing your interaction with the seller can limit your access to what is possibly behind the counter or future stock. So, anywhere you intend to visit regularly,



this is a poor tactic.

But what about the over excited enthusiast? Feigning excitement over Metroid and Super Mario

3, like you haven't seen them in years, and casually dropping titles like Clayfighters Sculptor's Cut or Zombie Nation in the hopes of snatching them up for a pittance. Again, this can work, but only temporarily at best. Once a store owner realizes you are coming in three times a week and asking about titles he's never heard of, he may start to do his own research. From there, even a cursory search will reveal that maybe a 4.99 sticker on bonk's adventure should instead be a 199.99 sticker. And even worse, all games that come in might start getting "eBay" prices, rendering the whole point of having a local source moot. Additionally, this can give you a dishonest or manipulative reputation at the store.



The best behavior, long term and short term, is one of honest transparency. Indicate upfront what your intentions are and what you might be willing to pay for certain games. I have personally made several amazing deals just by asking honestly if they had any other games. The difference being, they may not want to bother digging through a bunch of boxes for a guy who might not even spend 5 bucks on a bunch of old SNES games, but they will dig, and dig hard, if I tell them upfront what I want, and what I'm willing to pay. It's happened more than once. A guy at a swap meet had Demon's crest and Super Mario RPG in a box under a box that just didn't make it to the table that day. He would have wanted 10 each, but once I offered 50 for both, plus that sweet Mario Kart with Bobby written in sharpie on the back, he was excited to find them, almost as excited as I was to get them! And this works long-

term at local gaming stores too, if you come in everyday and build your reputation as a serious collector willing to spend fair money. Then those games that come in when you aren't there will start getting set aside for you, and not for the eBay resellers who also hunt the store! The manager at my own local game store isn't much interested in collecting since he likes modern games.

But he also knows that anytime something interesting comes in for the NES, SNES, or N64 it might be worth more than it appears. I'll get a text message, and it is easy enough reply with my interest level. Sure, this might cause me to pay more if an extremely rare

title comes in, but for the uncommon stuff - Bucky O Hare, Defenders of Dynatron, or Battletoads vs Double Dragon - instead of those titles going in the case for a few days, they go in the drawer and I just swing by after work and pay the store price!

I believe it's all about being up front with the seller, whoever that might be. Flea market vendor, pawn shop owner, or game store manager. We've reached a time when everyone is starting to know what old games are worth and the days of \$5 Mega Man games are almost gone. If they know you're a collector, and also a good guy to deal with, they will forgo the extra money that an eBay sale "might" bring in, skip all the hassle of shipping and dealing with a stranger, and just sell that CIB Earthbound cheap to you instead!



How I Stopped Being a Closet Collector and Went to



By: Ferris Bueller

This all starts with a Craigslist post. I had been collecting NES games since college and what started as simply buying the games my parents gave away slowly became something else. I got serious, ending up with hundreds of doubles I wanted to trade.

Enter Kirk (DivingNinja). He responded to my post, wanting some of my 3/5 screw variants, and when we finally met up, we talked variants, where my collection stood, and who else I knew that collected. I admitted it was just me. To be honest, none of my friends really gave a shit. Sure, I could have a casual conversation about MTPO or LoZ, but anything past the most well-known of titles and I got blank stares. So I finally just quit talking about my obsession.

Kirk asked if I was on NA. Sure, I'd seen it. Some of my internet game searches had taken me to forum discussions and variant lists, but to be honest, what could I possibly contribute? So I lurked. But Kirk was a really cool guy. For the first time, I was talking with someone who knew as much as I did, if not more. I wondered, "Is this what I've been missing?" So I signed up.

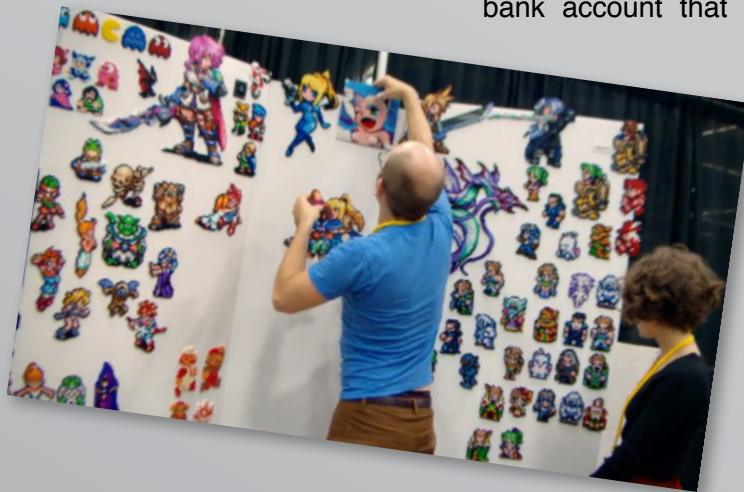
Two years later I find myself interviewing Howard Phillips at PRGE and asking, "How the hell did this happen?"

It was a combination of things, but every one of them was directly related to NA. What began as some simple trades online escalated this past summer when I went on my first hunt with Kirk and Charlie (Shipwreckd). If Kirk was the beginning of this journey, I would have to say meeting Charlie would be milestone number two. Charlie was hilarious and his knowledge of the local scene was overwhelming. He took us all over central Texas, driving hours to go to stores in towns I had only seen on maps. But, everywhere he took me I was finding titles I needed! Being a little over a 100 games from a complete collection at the time, it was hard for me to find missing carts. But when I got home, I crossed off twenty or so titles I had been looking for!

What was going on?

I realized it was the NA members. The deeper I involved myself with the community, the more I felt like I was a part of it. I found myself wanting to meet more members, to get to know the people I was talking, debating, and buying and trading with. So when Arch 8ngel mentioned I should interview Robin (Tetris Mattress) and Adam of EoO fame for the ezine, I thought a simple phone call just wouldn't do. If I was going to talk with these guys, I wanted to do it in person and on film. So off to Portland I went, with my camera and bag full of equipment.

The footage I got was nothing short of amazing once I got to PRGE. I found myself talking with the family of the Intellivision creator, David P. Chandler, or "Papa Intellivision" as he is known, who unfortunately passed away last year. They had some of the rarest Intellivision products in the world on display at their booth, including the Intellivision Keyboard Component that turned the Intellivision into a computer. Did I mention it had a voice recognition system for audio commands? Yeah, that was back in 1979. I chatted with Mark Erikson, box art illustrator for such classic titles as Galaga for the Atari 2600 and Mega Man 2 for the NES. Don't worry, he cleared up any questions there have been as to why Mega Man is holding a pistol, and I assure you, it's not his fault. I sat down with Greg Pabich for a one on one on Cheetahmen II, where he told me about a million dollar wire transfer to a Nassau bank account that



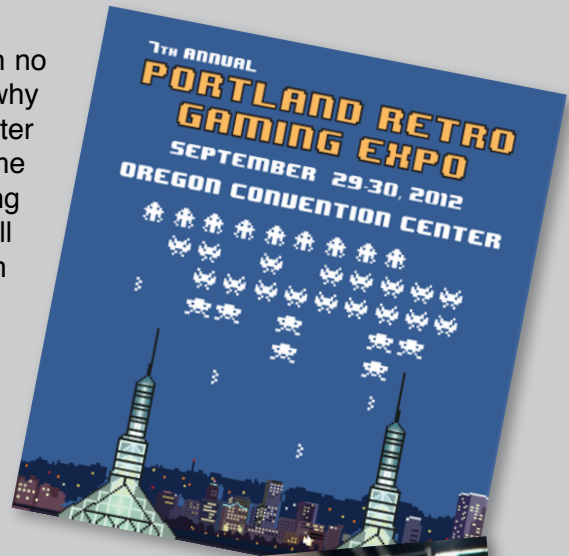
never happened after he saw an empty Florida warehouse with no employees. And somehow, I talked with Howard Phillips about why I didn't get to play FFI or III for the NES and what his Kickstarter for "Know-It-all" is all about. I even had a chance to play the game firsthand. Don't worry, you'll see me struggle in the video, wanting so bad to understand the game and support HP. But then you'll also see the moment a minute later when it clicks for me, and I'm telling you guys right now, I think he's on to something. I never did actually sit down to interview Robin, at least not on the record. But what I did get to do was drink Beverages and compete in an impromptu Tetris tourney in his living room (a race to complete a hundred lines from level zero) against a dozen Tetris Grand Masters, including the now three time world champion Jonas Neubauer (who, let it be known, lost in the first round). I also met our fearless leader, Dain, along with Josh (QixMaster), James (Gwyndion, who likes to hug it out), Nick (thenickross), Vince (Uncle Tusk), LinktoFuture, Benihana, Arch 8ngel, theguy1962, and so many more that I think I've already forgotten who all I did meet!

Sure, sure, this article was supposed to be a behind the scenes look at EoO and what it took for those dudes to make that awesome documentary (if you haven't seen it yet, pull your head out). But as NA has surpassed the 10,000 member mark, I wanted to try and talk to those that may be where I was two years ago: on the fence about participating in this community.

Guys, I was you. Shoot, I still am. I'm just a little fish collecting cart only compared to some of these guys buying and selling VGA graded games for thousands of dollars or hunting down a one of five run homebrew from Spain. But at the end of the day, they still love Nintendo just like you and me. I guess what I'm trying to get across is that the video you're about to see all happened simply because I got a little more involved. Trust me, I never would have imagined in my whole life I would meet Howard Phillips, let alone interview him. But I did, and who knows, maybe you could, too.

*You can see the video companion piece to this article on the NA front page. Thank you Dain and Shane for giving me the opportunity to do this, and I hope that ya'll enjoy what I came back with. Everyone couldn't have been nicer, this weekend couldn't have been better, and it was more than I ever thought it would be. It felt like... I was finally home.

****To see the full video interviews click here.***



ARMY MEN™

SARGE'S HEROES™



Featured Game Review: **By: Leatherrebel5150**

BACK STORY

Army Men Sarge's Heroes was the fourth game in the Army Men series, and first in the series to come to the N64 console, developed by publisher 3DO.

The series is based on an ongoing struggle between various plastic army men. Each group is distinguished by their color green, tan, gray, blue, orange, red, and black. Black and red factions only make rare appearances and orange only being mentioned once but never seen.



THE GAME

You take control of Sarge, the sole remaining member of Bravo Company, of the green army. General Plastro, the commander of the enemy Tan Army, has captured the rest of your fellow commandos, and has also discovered portals that lead into the human world. Plastro has gathered weapons of mass destruction including a magnifying glass, M-80's, and a garbage disposal to be used to finally defeat the green army. Your mission is to work through 16 levels to rescue your fellow soldiers and Viki, mentioned later, and destroy the portals before Plastro can bring his weapons back from the human world.

You start off with the tan army overrunning the green army base. Your one mission is to rescue Colonel Grimm and get him and yourself to the helicopter before the Tan army overruns the base. Once done it is Colonel Grimm who will give you updates on the war and your next objectives for upcoming missions. After the initial rescue, Viki Grimm makes her appearance. She is Sarge's love interest and plays supporting roles in many Army Men games. In Sarge's Heroes she convinces General Plastro that she is on the side of the tan army and pretends to give him useful information, at least until he sees through her ruse and takes her captive as well. So along with saving fellow soldiers you will have to save her too.

The action takes place in both your "home" world and the "real" or human world. In the human world you

go through various environments including a garden, kitchen, and bathroom. (Interestingly, the characters don't seem to notice anything strange about this world other than, if I remember correctly, that there is a reference to everything being huge.) It is not made clear if these places are all a part of the same house but I suspect they are.

SOUND AND GRAPHICS

The basic display consists of a picture of Sarge's face, health bar, weapon/ammo selected, and radar. Sarge's face is just another health meter that becomes more beat up as you lose health. The graphics are not spectacular. The soldiers themselves don't look too bad, it is not hard to make them look like plastic, but the environment in the soldier's world is sparse and uninspired. There are a few



buildings and a tree here or there but overall there a bunch of open space. The human world, on the other hand is a bit better. There appears that there was a little bit more effort put into these environments, with stress on a "little bit."



More household items are scattered around such as blocks, soaps, furniture, depending on the area of the house you are in. But if you are going across a large expanse, say the kitchen floor or a pool table, expect there to be not much in the way of cover to hide behind.

Although it lacks visually, Army Men does have pretty good music. If you were to imagine any war movie and the soundtrack in it, you would expect a lot of snare drum and lower end notes. Well that's what you get with Army Men. It puts you in that mood where you know you could very well be shot just around the next corner so you keep your eyes locked onto the screen and ears listening for the sound of gunfire. Speaking of gunfire, the sound effects in this game are pretty good. Rifles sound like rifles, flamethrowers make that recognizable *whoosh*, sound and mortars make the *fuump*. When soldiers are hit they all make the same scream but it is not an obnoxious sound like I've heard from some games.

CONTROLS

Now for the part most tend to care about more than graphics and sound, which is, how does the game play? This is where Army Men drops the ball. The biggest problem is the camera. It is slow to react when you suddenly change direction and does not always provide the optimal angle. So if you are heading in one direction and someone fires from behind your pretty much screwed because by the time you turn around and allow the camera to adjust you have taken 3 or 4 hits. Unless that is you have a machine gun or rifle (except the sniper rifle) equipped because they have the ability to auto aim so it gives you a slight chance against the enemies you can't see. The horrible angles also makes some jumps a real chore because you can't gauge distance accurately. The most annoying aspect of the controls is actually moving Sarge. It is hard to explain unless you try it but when you want to change direction drastically you don't just make a turn, you have to stop and rotate Sarge in the direction you want to go then press forward on the control stick to proceed. This is not as big of a problem as the camera issue but can be really annoying to get used to. One more thing that was extremely annoying was there are a few occasions where you must pull a switch to open a door. You must be PERFECTLY lined up with those switches to pull them. When I was playing I thought I was doing something wrong because it would not open. But if Sarge is turned just a few degrees off of center then he will jump rather than pull the switch.

CHALLENGE

Unfortunately the majority of the challenge of this game does come from the issue with the camera and controls. With the crappy angles the camera gives and slow reaction time it has, it just makes it really difficult to

retaliate against an enemy firing at your position. If it was not for this the game would be extremely easy almost too easy. There are guns and ammo everywhere so worrying about running out of ammo is no real concern and enough health boxes scattered about to keep the health bar full. If the camera issues were not there then there might have been some genuine challenge in later levels where you have to destroy toy robots that the tan army has taken control of. These things will kill you in seconds if you do not find cover and take an incredible amount of fire to kill compared to the average enemy soldier.

FINAL THOUGHT



If you can get past the control and camera issues than Army Men Sarge's Heroes is not THAT bad of a game, not great but still playable. I mean I was able to play and beat the game. It can keep your attention for awhile and be somewhat fun. I do like the variety of weapons and how they can all be carried at the same time, something not seen in modern games anymore. If you're looking for a quick pick up and play it has the old school cheat code tool right on the main menu so you can blast through a quick favorite level. Overall Army Men Sarge's Heroes had a lot of potential. A whole game where you fight with and against plastic army men, what young boy would not jump all over that? But sadly it did not live up to the potential it had. So although it can be fun I would not say it is a must buy for your collection, nor would I really even recommend it.

FINAL GRADE





MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



USERNAME

GAMEMASTERHOWARD

NAME :
JOINED NA :
OCCUPATION :

HOWARD PHILLIPS
SEPTEMBER 10, 2012
CEO KNOW-IT-ALL LLC
AND GAMING LEGEND

First off, I want to start by saying thank you to the great Howard Phillips for giving me the opportunity to talk to him about the amazing influence that he had on one of the things that have been such a huge part of my life. For those of you that don't know, Howard recently joined NintendoAGE under the screenname Gamemaster Howard. He has also recently created a Facebook page that he often updates with scans and pictures of some pretty amazing Nintendo pieces. Check it out here: <https://www.facebook.com/GamemasterHoward>

Burdger: Okay, so for our readers that might not know much about you, can you give a brief explanation of what your job was at Nintendo and what was included in your job description?

Howard: I had lots of responsibilities during my ten years at Nintendo. I started out as Shipping and Warehouse manager but it was just me moving all the boxes and crates around and doing all the shipping and receiving. At that time and since I was the guy who had a handtruck I was responsible for running our test route for Arcade games - Radar Scope and then Donkey Kong...

Burdger: I read a bit about that in your interview with your son

Howard: Alex(andra) actually is my daughter :)

Burdger: Ha, my apologies. I guess I didn't pay close enough attention :D

Howard: No worries - others made the same assumption including I think the author of that piece.

Burdger: Well, I'm glad I'm not alone! So from a Warehouse Manager to Creative Director? That's an impressive jump

Howard: In a small company everyone pitches in and does whatever they can - my work managing the test route for the Arcade games had me regularly talking with and watching gamers play the games at our various test locations. I would summarize what I'd seen and heard to Mr. A(rakawa) and then letter, in faxes sent off to Mr. Miyamoto. Do that for about five years for numerous Nintendo and competitor products and I became the "go-to" guy game-wise at Nintendo of America. Then when we started tweaking the Japanese games more robustly for the US market as well as working with 2nd-Party Developers like Chris and Tim Stamper at RARE I ended up directing a lot of the creative - hence the title ;)



Burdger: It's kind of crazy to hear Nintendo referred to as a "small company!"

Howard: When I started Nintendo was only 5 guys in a warehouse with a small internal office space... It kept relatively small until 1986 when things got a bit crazy...

Burdger: That would have been such an amazing position to be in.

Howard: it was a lot of fun of course... so many cool new games every week...

Burdger: In your interview with your daughter, you mentioned assisting in picking out some of the first releases for the NES. Do you remember if there were any in particular that you really pushed for, or that you didn't like, or even any that you really wanted, that didn't make it here to begin with?

Howard: I liked Excitebike for the fast (back then) action, and Baseball was fun to play 2-player. Duck Hunt was fun to get good at and the Zapper technology was cool on a home system - in the Arcade if you missed that meant you were one step closer to Game Over - with the NES it wasn't defeating to miss. Kung Fu had a simple but fun and challenging mechanic and Wrecking Crew was weird but fun - Like Donkey Kong but with a lot more ladders and you could continuously bust stuff.

Burdger: Excitebike is still one of my favorite games of all time. I'd say you did a good job picking out games to release with the NES.

Being from a collector site, a lot of our members are interested in release numbers, serial numbers and similar things that really have no interest at all to most people. Do you happen to know much about this? We actually have a thread that tracks the lowest serial number on systems. Do you have any idea if they started at UN00000001?

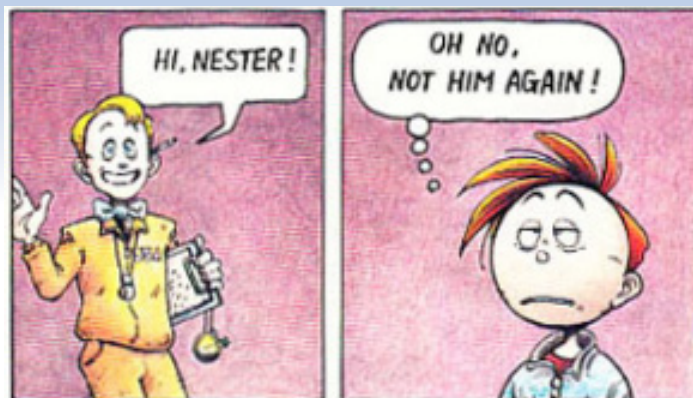
Howard: Unfortunately I don't recall - sorry.

Burdger: Heh, I knew it was a long shot.

Ok, so in the early years of the NES, Bandai released a game pad that you could stand and run on, and obviously, Nintendo really liked this idea. Did you have anything to do with this buyout?

Howard: I remember getting Bandai's Family Trainer in the warehouse - Athletic World - it was kinda goofy but a different kind of fun. As the NES base grew I kept an eye out for games that would expand the appeal and the Family Trainer was weird and different enough to catch the eye of parents looking for something different that "straight" games.

Burdger: So the big question about the Family Fun Fitness Pad and the Power Pad is, when Nintendo bought the rights



to it, the names of things were changed, including a game called Stadium Events (renamed World Class Track Meet). Any idea what happened to all of the copies of Stadium Events that Bandai had already produced? Just in case you don't know, that game is considered by many to be the holy grail of NES collecting.

Howard: Bandai release Stadium Events about a year before Nintendo released World Class Track Meet so they had time to sell them all, if even at a discount. Bandai ordered around ten thousand that must be out there somewhere - maybe some warehouse somewhere waiting to be rediscovered...

Burdger: I dream of it all the time!

Howard: Hah!

Burdger: Some other games that many collectors wonder about is Earthbound. We have some pretty impressive prototype collections here at NA. Earthbound/Mother has always been one of the prototypes that everyone wants. Do you know why it was never released on the NES?

Howard: Mother was cool but at the time Nintendo of America was pushing Dragon Quest / Warrior as it had been a huge hit in Japan... Mother was not nearly as successful there and so it was put behind the DQ/W series release-wise...

Burdger: Understandable. I personally prefer the Dragon Warrior games

Howard: The Final Fantasy series came along and pushed it further back/down... Then SNES, etc. etc...

Burdger: Lucky for us it did see the light of day on SNES

So speaking of prototypes, I read about your connection to the recently sold Legend of Zelda prototype. THAT would be my personal holy grail of any game system! Did you always have access to prototypes of games like this?

Howard: Anything new had to come into the warehouse which I ran so I would get a chance for hands-on time before anyone else and then later every new game was sent to me directly...



Burdger: Amazing...

Howard: It was fun playing games that were complete mysteries either because they hadn't been released anywhere yet or they had been released for FCS but were in Japanese so the in-game tips were useless to me - I first played and completed The Legend of Zelda for FDS that way - it made it extra challenging ;) For that reason I really appreciated the English prototype cartridge... and the battery back-up meant no waiting for the disc writes and loads as well.

Burdger: Although I had other games first, The Legend of Zelda was my first video game obsession. I played that game constantly until I could play it with my eyes closed, well, almost.

Do you still have any of the prototypes you had access to back then?

Howard: I've got a bunch of grey carts, most with sockets and EPROMs, some unlabeled that I should try out again when I have a chance... It was fun seeing the yellow Zelda cartridge as I'd forgotten about it - seeing my handwriting on it transported me back 25 years... Plus a bunch of other random stuff in my Archives which I'm slowly working through and posting on the Gamemaster Howard Facebook page...

Burdger: I'm sure our proto collectors are going to be salivating at the idea of unmarked grey carts and EPROMs :D

Have you seen any of the reproductions or homebrews that have become very popular recently? How do you feel about some of these unreleased games being reproduced and made available to gamers and collectors?

Howard: I've been tangentially aware of the homebrew phenomenon - I like the idea of gamers making games themselves and of course I like games being made that have retro roots...

Burdger: There are some really good ones out there for sure. Some of my favorites are Battle Kid and Ultimate Frogger Championship (Frogger was always a favorite of mine, and now it's on the NES!) If you ever decide to check any of them out, I recommend those two for sure.

Howard: Will do!

Burdger: One of the most popular reproductions is the Nintendo World Championships 1990 cart. How involved were you in that competition?

Howard: Fun to hear that folks still appreciate the NWC cart as I was responsible for its design; the competition games, the progression triggers, etc. Of course I showed up at many of the competitions themselves. Still have a grey cart and a bunch of All Access badges around here somewhere...

Burdger: Very cool! The NWC is an amazing piece of work. Being a strategy guy, I figured you really enjoyed the competitions, seeing how the strategies changed as the competition went along.

Howard: More than half the fun in gaming is gaming the game of course... figuring out how to do things to your advantage in a way unanticipated by the designers...

Burdger: Many of the NWC finalists have joined NA after finding out the interest in the competition, including Thor Aackerlund and Robin Mihara. Robin has even recently helped release a Documentary about Tetris called Ecstasy of Order. It's a very cool Doc about Robin trying to find the best Tetris player in the world, this all stemming from his NWC days. Have you heard anything about it?

Howard: Nope... been somewhat offline for a number of years but I'm getting back in the game now ;)

Burdger: It was actually just released on DVD and on iTunes. Another recent creation I highly recommend checking out. It's actually spawned a yearly Tetris Competition, the third of which is going to take place at the Portland Retro Gaming Show September 29th-30th.

Howard: Cool!

Burdger: I actually just received a message from a member that is running the NintendoAGE booth there telling me to invite you. He said you can "set up" at the NA booth with him, ha!

Howard: Not sure my schedule allows but I'll check into it later today...

Burdger: What are you up to now? I know you left for Lucas Arts back in the day, but are you still connected with Nintendo in any way?

Howard: Not doing anything currently with Nintendo - its a totally different company these days and I think, focused

a bit differently then when I was there. Some of my co-workers are still there - whoa!

Burdger: Wow, that is impressive

Howard: I am up to something new. Over the last few years I've been very interested in neuroscience as it relates to gameplay... So I'm building an iOS game (other platforms to follow) that merges great gameplay with a very interesting (to me at least) finding from recent brain-imaging studies. The game helps anyone become a Know-It-All of anything in a manner that is fast and fun, not laborious and painful like the traditional alternatives.

Burdger: That sounds very interesting! I can't wait to try it out

Howard: It seems we all have multiple memory systems, not just the one - one is conscious and effortful and the other is automatic and almost effortless. The second one is the one we use in games so much that helps us simply learn stuff without even trying. The game targets that second system while avoiding exercising the first system. Since it applies to general brain memory systems it can and does work with anything you want to learn, from foreign language vocabulary to pre-med anatomy to times tables to the names of the hero in each NES Game ;)

Burdger: Wow, that is a very cool concept! How far from completion is it?

Howard: Monday I'm announcing a Kickstarter Project with the game releasing later this year. The Kickstarter will be fun as I have a couple of surprises in store for the retro collectors out there ;)

Burdger: Neat, I'm sure the NA community will be very interested in this for sure

Howard: Its not an epic game like Zelda, but like Tetris, I hope its fun and addicting for many and yet also lets you become a know-it-all of anything you want as it works with free content of any type downloaded from the cloud.

Burdger: I love this idea!

Howard: I'll send you some links in a bit so you can see more.

Burdger: Very cool!

Howard: Well... I hope your enthusiasm is shared amongst a lot of gamers and I hope I don't let any of you down with the final game experience. I'm pretty demanding in that way so once the Kickstarter is underway I've got to get back to being heads-down working on refining the gameplay...

Burdger: If it is anything like the games you had an influence on from the NES era, I'm sure we'll all love it.

So after that epic announcement, is there anything else you'd like the NA community to know about you that we haven't covered?

Howard: Just that I'm back in the saddle and plan to share more from those fun Nintendo days. I will likely do a reddit AMA on Monday so I'll post info on that beforehand on the Gamemaster Howard Facebook page... I look forward to being a more active member of the NA community!

Burdger: Oh, we will absolutely love it. NA grew very quickly because of it's members' vast knowledge of retro gaming, and we constantly hunger for more.

Oh yeah, one more question. I need you to help end what could otherwise be an endless debate about the Original Nintendo. When you talk about it, do you call it N.E.S. or do you say Ness?

Howard: I say "N...E...S..." without pauses between the letters...

Burdger: Perfect! I win!

Howard: Nobody at Nintendo called it Ness...

Burdger: That is so good to hear! I always thought it was odd people called it a Ness.

Howard: Although we did call the SNES Sness ;)

Burdger: NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

Howard: SNES at first and then Sness as time wore on...

Burdger: Well, Howard, there is so much more that I'd like to ask you about, but I don't want to keep you for too long. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this with me. I know all of our readers will be more than pleased to read this.

Howard: Great Ross - it was fun.



STRENGTH in SIMPLICITY

The Power and Artistry of the NES

By: m308gunner

*“We hold these truths to be self evident; that all pixels are created equal.
Some are just rather more cleverly placed than others...”*



Many gamers today hold fond memories in their hearts towards the 8-bit graphics of the NES. They know that, despite the sometimes simplistic presentation, those blocky little sprites conveyed so much with so little, and could produce so much fun and enjoyment.

Many other gamers, both new and old, hold not-so-fond memories in their hearts. They view the 8-bit style much as one would an embarrassing childhood photograph, yellowed and tattered with age.

“It happened, sure, but let’s forget about it...”

“Yes, those were formative years, but we’re more mature now...”

“Onward and upward...”

“Just put it away will you?!?”

Some would equate the somewhat crude graphics of yesteryear to caveman paintings and today’s modern

graphics with the likes of Rembrandt or Alex Grey. And really who's to say they wouldn't be right? Judging merely by what we see, the comparison might not be too far from the truth, at least technologically speaking. However, there might be more at work here than meets the eye.

The NES graphics we all know and love may not be as visually impressive as the current generation of video games, but hidden in the simplicity of those 8x8 pixel grids lies an unexpected strength. A strength that the early pioneers, creators and designers may not have fully understood (*I imagine the good ones did*), but that nonetheless helped their games enormously.

Let's back up a bit first. Say we take a hypothetical story and publish it as a book and a multi-million dollar movie. Now the book has certain limitations, to be sure, but those limitations are more than made up for by its strengths. There are certain things a skilled author can do with the written word (or a graphic novel) that a director, no matter how good, simply cannot replicate on the silver screen. With a novel you yourself can breathe life into the characters and stories and give the world meaning and purpose that perhaps even the author did not intend. You as the reader help to complete the world, characters and events through your own imagination.



I'd like to compare and contrast the movie Hugo with the book, but that's a bit off topic considering the book also brilliantly uses pictures, and that would bring up the strength of words and pictures together, which would lead to the strength of comics as an art form, which would lead me to start waxing poetic about Scott McCloud's book Understanding Comics....
No Time!

Now if you go to the movies and see that same story up on the screen you can be sure that every action, movement, emotion (and sometimes blade of grass) will be placed exactly where, when and how the director wishes it to be. You are given less freedom to interpret and participate in the world that is being presented to you, and so are more of a passive observer than an active participant.

The fact that there are inherent differences between the medium of film, literature and video games notwithstanding, I don't think it is too far

a cry to compare the 8-bit presentation of the NES to a book, and more modern graphics to big budget movies.

8-bit graphics, by their very (limited) nature, require more imagination, more player involvement, and more participation in fleshing out the game's world than their modern counterparts. You as the player help to "fill in the gaps" as it were (and there is certainly a place for our suspending disbelief in some games). There are times when certain elements could be misinterpreted, to be sure, but I am of the opinion that it only serves to add another level of charm, interest and freedom to an already rich artform.

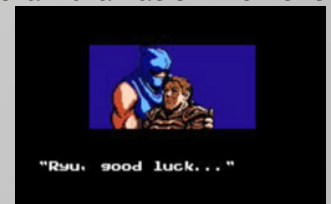


Can't tell you how long I thought this...



was this!

Certainly, whenever there is a "dramatic" moment in an 8-bit game you are largely required to implant the emotions from your own imagination into the story at hand. Otherwise it will nearly always come off as rather shallow and lifeless.



8-bit virtually demands that you participate in its world in a way that modern video games do not always allow. If I may use an example from my own childhood - I recall playing the first Dragon Warrior in my basement with my friends (*after receiving it from Nintendo Power in the early nineties during that famous promotional run. Poor Nintendo Power... *sniff**). One of us would be playing the game, and while they were fighting a monster, one of us would be mimicking the actions on screen, swinging and attacking with an old pool cue in hand, and taking hits as our character on screen did. (How else would a group of children be able to endure the endless hours of level grinding?)

Modern games leave practically nothing to the imagination, as every facet of the game world is spoon fed to you. There are some games, of course, where the plot/story is so compelling and intricate that the graphics are merely a vehicle to carry it along, but again, you as a player are taking on a more passive role (think Xenosaga vs. Contra). Your window of interpretation is narrowed quite a bit. And speaking as an older gamer who likes to have a

chance at following all the on-screen action, when there are a half billion things happening it can lead to a kind of visual confusion/migraine/nausea on the order of the Transformers movies (*though the nausea may have to do more with Shia LaBeouf and the plot/lack of plot*).

One of the other side effects/benefits of the limited 8-bit palette were the sometimes (though certainly not always) beautifully drawn booklets and maps that came with the games. The box and booklet artwork helped to flesh out a reality that was, for the most part, only crudely represented (*or would that be beautifully simplified?*) and helped to give you a reference point as you explored the game's world. Certainly the presence of art shows like 'I Am 8bit' attests that there were oceans of interpretative space to be filled in the classic NES games. An ocean made possible, oddly enough, by the restrictions of the hardware.

I would also like to add that the limited color palette used for characters like Mario, Link, Samus and others has a historical precedent back to the day of early superhero comics.



While the technological limitations of the NES restricted the colors of most of our favorite heroes to 3 or 4, so too did the technological (and financial) limitations of the early newspaper printing process limit the number of colors an artist could effectively use in their superhero costumes. Thus, when deciding which colors to use an artist had just so many choices, and most of the iconic superheroes really had only 2 or 3 colors in their costumes (*again, see Scott McCloud's fantastic book Understanding Comics for*

more on the fascinating history and mechanics of comics).

While we are on the subject of art, could it be argued that pixels are the modern equivalent to the dabs of paint used in the Pointillism movement made famous by the likes of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac? Both styles utilize bits of color placed next to each other to simulate an image. Of course one uses a TV screen and light as its means of conveying an image, and the other uses paint and canvas, but there are some striking similarities in both form and function.




Now could the same be said of older systems such as the Atari? Of course not. Atari sucks sweaty swampy donkey scrotum!



DIGITAL EXCELLENCE



DIGITAL EXCREMENT



Two Dollar bills, A Near Death Experience for My Dad and How I Got My NES.

By: MrFlutterPie

My mom wanted to raise me right. I wasn't allowed to watch much T.V or play with many toys if they were violent. My mom especially opposed video games. I was born in 1986 so I was poised to cash in on the great 16 bit boom. However, I was sadly left just watching everybody else enjoy their SNES and Sega Genesis. I wanted a SNES more than anything in my life but with my mom it was never to be. I was one sad little child. When I was 8 years old my dad and I went camping just the two of us. On the way home we saw a garage sale just off the side of the road. My family loves garage sales so of course my dad pulls over to take a look. We're looking around and what do I see? Sitting in a brown cardboard box was an old NES with a few games, 2 controllers and the Zapper. The box had a price of \$25 scrawled over it. My dad comes over and see's my excitement over this find. He looks through his wallet and all he has is \$11 on him. My dad the crafty one gave me the money and said "if you can get him down to \$11 you can have it." Now my dad didn't think I would be able to get it more than half off. He was just trying to come off as a



hero for me. He also knew if I got it my mom would castrate him with the rusty garden shears out in the garage. So I go up to the guy with my fist full of \$2 bills (Hey it's 1994 Canada!) With the most pathetic look in my eyes I whimper out "will you take \$11 for the Nintendo?" The guy thinks about it for a second looking at the sad desperation in my eyes and voice then says "ok". I threw my money at him grabbed the box and ran back to the car where my dad was wearing the most shocked and panicked look I have ever seen wear. We drive an hour back home me holding the box on my lap with a smile as wide as an aircraft carrier and my dad looking like a death row inmate. We get home I jump out of the car and I burst through the door loudly proclaiming delight. My mom was not amused to say the least. I asked my dad a few months ago what my mom did to him over it. He just simply said "I was punished severely" which was interesting because my mom had the same answer. My dad really took one for the team for me that day. While I never did get my SNES during my childhood I am so ever thankful my dad took a chance introduced me to the World of Nintendo.



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Poetry

AND SEGA

BY: MRFLUTTERPIE



The Legend of

ZELDA

Oh Link you are on a quest
 Your courage and wits will be put to the test
 You wield the master sword
 With it you must defeat a dark Lord
 Use your bombs to find hidden rooms
 Hurry up and rescue princess Zelda soon
 Hookshots are sure to help
 Look out for Octoroks who stones they will pelt
 Moblins will attack a traveler unwary
 To survive this quest be sure to collect fairies
 In the dungeon don't get lost
 For at the end there will be a boss
 The fight will be long
 But Link will emerge victorious as he is strong
 Strike with your silver arrow
 Make that evil Gannon chill right down to his marrow
 You will only get one shot
 With it Gannon must be stopped
 With Gannon defeated the triforce is in good hands
 Link and Zelda will now head back to the Hyrule lands



Sonic is on mission
 Dr. Robotnick power has risen
 Make it through each zone
 Your enemies you will pwn
 Oh sonic you are so fast
 Your enemies you will run past
 Pick up those rings
 Look out for spikes as they sting
 For that extra speed
 The super fast red shoes you will need
 To take a hit
 Be sure to grab a shield that will fit
 Run fast through the loop de loops
 Make sure to grab all the gold hoops
 At the end you will face off against your enemy
 Defeat him for points a many
 Robotnick will flee
 But you will keep up with him you will see
 In the final battle
 You will make him rattle
 All the animals will be saved
 For Sonic it's any other day.



Oh Mario how you jump
 Those Goombas you do krump
 Throwing fire from your hands
 Exploring so many new lands
 The princess is kidnapped
 Oh my this is harder than fixing a leaky tap
 Bowser is up to his evil schemes
 With your brother and Yoshi you will team
 You'll need that star
 If you are to make it far
 Coins are sure to help
 If you get hit with a koopa shell it will sure to leave a welt
 Jump over those gaps
 Avoid those traps
 Look out for plants that want to eat a wary plumber
 To avoid that fire you'll have to be a fast runner
 But it's all in a day's work for Mario
 Next after Bowser you can tackle the evil Wario



It's time for the grand prix
 This won't be a cup of tea
 The whole gang is here
 Around the course they steer
 Armed with koopa shells
 Who's going to get hit no one can tell
 Banana peels are sure to make you slip
 Every time a person gets hit they make a fit
 Bowser and Donkey Kong throw around their weight
 Don't fall into the lake
 Boosts are sure to give you a push
 Don't get hit in the tush
 Cross that finish line
 You're in first you've done fine
 Now to race again
 Until somebody new wins

Kirby

Look out it's the little pink puff
He may not look tough
But he'll suck you up into his belly
All the enemies are like his personal deli
He will absorb his enemies powers
He'll climb up to the top of that tower
With a suck
He'll get a sword to cut
With an inhale
He'll get a parasail
He can even get lasers
He'll shoot discs sharp as razors
Battling evil trees and clouds
No matter what Kirby pleases a crowd
Soon it will be the final battle with King DeDeDe
This battle is much harder than the tree
With your wits and courage on your side
Kirby will turn the tide
Kirby will be the winner
Unfortunately he won't be any trimmer

Castlevania

Dracula has awakened
Your quest to kill him is taken
With your trusty whip
Your enemies you will rip
Grab your dagger
When you get hit you will stagger
Axes are to fly in an arc
Try not to be scared of the dark
Ghoulis creatures will come at you
With your weapons you will turn them into goo
Within the candles grab the hearts
You will need the when the battle with Dracula starts
That angry bloodsucker will be hard to beat
Every move of that ghoul you will meet
Finally he will be struck down
For the world peace will be found

METROID

There is a new threat in space
Prepare to lunge from the base
Innocent lives are in danger
A hero to whom danger is no stranger
Samus Aran is up to the mission
To end the threat she has the vision
There will be many vile creatures
A lesson in pain Samus will be the teacher
Grab the varia suit
For protection from head to boot
Use bombs to blow holes in walls
Roll up into a ball to get through the narrow halls
The freeze beam is cool
Samus is no fool
Metroids are deadly foe
They are getting bigger oh no!
Use your secondary weapon
Fight hard and see what happens
The Metroid is dead
Only a few more to go you are ahead
The final showdown will be with the queen
She is mean
But Samus is tough
The battle will be rough
Samus will beat the creature
Samus a hero the galaxy will feature

SPLATTERHOUSE

スプラッターハウス

わんぱくグラフィティ

A BLOODY GOOD TIME

BY: RETRODAVE



There are many great Famicom games that never saw a North American release. Such is the case with Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti. Released for the Famicom in 1989 by Namcot (the Japanese branch of Namco), it was the first home console release of the series. And while the Splatterhouse series is known for being violent, gory beat 'em ups, Wanpaku Graffiti took a different approach, one of parody and platforming.

Like other titles in the Splatterhouse series, this one starts with the Rick, the protagonist, being brought back from the dead by the Terror Mask to save his girlfriend Jennifer. However this game does not take place in the West Mansion. The Pumpkin King, who looks suspiciously like the Great Pumpkin, has kidnapped Jennifer for some untold reason and Rick has to traverse an assortment of haunted and horrific stages to get her back, fighting an all-star cast of monsters. All while being cute and funny.

The beauty of the game is its simplicity. You jump, you attack, and you dodge. That's all you need. And this results in a fun, pure form of gameplay, completely devoid of gimmicks. There is a nice mix of platforming and side scrolling beat 'em up action, which stays fresh due to the variety of the stage design. The stages themselves are short and sweet, each ending with a challenging but amusing boss. The bosses can be tough until you learn their patterns, but once you do they aren't much trouble.

With seven stages it is a fairly short game, as most beat 'em ups are. After a little practice, you can sit down and play Wanpaku Graffiti from beginning to end in one sitting and have a great time doing it. But you'll want to go back and do it again and again because this game leaves you satisfied, but wanting more. There are even multiple endings if you find two orbs hidden throughout the game, giving extra replayability.

One thing that is worth mentioning is the continue system. As Rick, you get one life. When you start the game you have a small life meter, but it can be increased by killing enemies. This increase gets carried over when you continue, but you are limited



to 4 continues. When you run out of continues, you have the choice of starting over from the first level or using a password given to you at the beginning of each stage. However, using a password will start you with the original small life meter, leaving you at a disadvantage. I consider this to be a fair and balanced system, and it fits very well with the game. The game is challenging, but it just wants you to have fun.

Perhaps the best part about Wanpaku Graffiti is the humor, a rare commodity in games. It is filled with tongue-in-cheek references to classic horror and sci-fi movies and tropes. There were many times while playing that I dropped the controller in a fit of laughter. What other game has Dracula doing the Thriller dance, Jeff Goldblum turning into The Fly, and the laughing deer head from Evil Dead 2? The whole cast of characters is clever, wacky, fun, and endearing. My personal favorite enemy is the oven that spits headless chickens out to attack you. You will grow to love these characters during your adventure, and you'll be happy to see them again every time you play, even if they are trying to kill you.

Some gamers may feel hesitant to import Famicom games due to the language barrier, but Wanpaku Graffiti is completely accessible to all gamers, even those who can't read Japanese. Aside from the title screen and a few lines of dialogue at the end, this game is completely in English. Even the title screens for each stage have hilarious English text. If you've never played a Famicom game before, this would be a great place to start. Get yourself a pin converter, or better yet a Famicom, and go pick up this game. You won't be disappointed. It might even be the start of a new collection.



NOW PLAYING

TRANSFORMERS THE GAME

BY: THEWALRUSIAL

When I was 6 years old, I wanted to be a Transformer for Halloween. By 1988 the robots in disguise had lost a little of their luster and finding the appropriate costume must have been a bit tough, because what we found was bullshit. Somewhere in my parents' house is the home movie VHS proof - footage of me waiting to go trick-or-treating wearing my plastic Optimus Prime mask and a set of blue pajamas that said "Transformers" across the chest. Some 'costume'.

Transform and roll out!

THE MOVIE



The first time I watched Michael Bay's 2007 stab at making a Transformers movie, I hated it. HATED. IT. There were a bunch of human characters I couldn't care less about. Megan Fox is beautiful, yes, but her acting chops are only marginally better than those of a poster of Megan Fox. John Turturro is a horribly misacted waste. Who ARE all of these people? Where are the robots? Bay can't

help but shake the camera and zoom in way too close during action scenes. What am I looking at? The plot was about some allspark somesuch and a cube maguffin and...well it was about as deep as any of the original cartoon episodes were.

But above all, the thing I hated most was the design of the Transformers. Bumblebee was and in my mind always should be a VW Beetle. Megatron should be a Nazi pistol. And Starscream...what did they do to Starscream? Why does he now look like a giant mecha-chicken? The robots were a mess and

I mentally checked out when I saw them on the big screen. No amount of Megan Fox belly shirts or cut-off shorts would be able to bring me back. Ok...they helped a little.

Cut to 5 years later and I decided to rewatch the Bay movie after losing myself in an unhealthy number of hours of the original G1 25th Anniversary DVDs. And you know what? My position has changed. The Bay film still has the same problems as before, but I'm not as upset by them as I was before. I'm used to the complex and crappy robot designs and the fact that Ratchet is no longer a boxy white ambulance. I was expecting all of the dumb people to be as dumb as they were the first time I saw them - as they say, knowing is half the battle. Knowing what was coming allowed my brain to appreciate the movie and enjoy the action much more the second time around. I.. like this movie? Well, let's say I like it more than I used to. It IS possible to have fun while watching it.

The new Starscream still sucks.

THE GAME

Is it any wonder that a movie based on a cartoon based on toys would receive a video game tie-in? Released in 2007 on Wii, PS3, Xbox 360, PS2, DS, PSP, N64, Virtual Boy, Commodore 64 and Spectrum ZX, Transformers is an adequate action game that was a mixed experience on the Wii.

You play through what, on the surface, appears to be an open world; stepping on glowing hot spots to trigger the next mission in the campaign. I say 'open world' with an asterisk - the only things for you to do between missions are collect glowing boxes and attempt little side missions that ultimately reward





you with forgettable unlockables like movie trailers and concept art. And some of them are balls hard - so fugggetaboutit.

If you give more than 15 minutes to this game you may adjust to the WORST CAMERA EVER in a video game, and potentially have some fun. You get an Autobot and Decepticon campaign to play through with the latter being the more enjoyable route. After a while though, all of the missions end up feeling the same - fight a robot, fight a group of robots, race against some robots, destroy a base. It gets especially tedious once your enemies throw up their shields and you're forced into nonstop Wii-waggle melee attacks.

All of the Autobots are (rightfully so) ground vehicles that range from WAY fast (Jazz) to WAY slow (Ironhide). With the Decepticons you at least get some variety with flying vehicles and Scorponok's sand-burrowing vehicle form.

Still, the game underwhelms, and you've got much better choices for Transformers games now with the War For/Fall Of Cybertron duo currently available. Ultimately, how much you like the Transformers (specifically Michael Bay's interpretation of them) will affect how much of a pass you give the poor presentation and frustrating controls of this particular title.

CONNECTIONS

PLOT

Despite a bit of padding here and there, the game does a serviceable job of making you feel like you're "playing the movie." As an Autobot you get to protect Sam Witwicky, have a throwdown in the city with Decepticreeps and deal some damage to Megatron while he's on ice in the Hoover Dam. Obtaining and protecting the allspark is the ultimate goal here, and overall the movie's plot is handled nicely.

The Decepticon campaign splits off from the canon of the film after you take out the US Army base in the opening mission. You'll wreak a bunch more havoc on innocent civilians and random fights with

Autobots as you continue what is actually a nicely twisted version of the Transformers story. I won't spoil the ending - but I did smirk at the way the bad guys' story ends.

CHARACTERS

All of the major characters from the movie are present and most have the same voice actors. Peter Cullen, Shia LeBeouf and Megan Fox reprise their roles; and in a nice touch the original voice of Megatron, Frank Welker, handles those duties here in the game (replacing the more expensive Hugo Weaving from the film).

You get to play as Bumblebee, Optimus Prime, Megatron, Starscream and a handful of others - as should be expected from any Transformers game. I did like the addition of Shockwave into the game as a boss fight. In addition to these and the other playable movie characters, there is an endless barrage of Autobot or Decepticon drones to fight against in many of the missions, a necessary addition to add some challenge to the game.

By far my FAVORITE characters in the game are the human NPCs that inhabit the city - apparently the programmers forgot to give them any sort of AI. Any time you (as a Transformer) start blowing up buildings or crashing into emergency vehicles head-on, everyone on the sidewalk starts going batshit crazy and starts to run around aimlessly. You can step on them, shoot at them - they don't care! I loved it when you heard people scream as they ran straight toward you.

MUSIC

As far as I can tell the music is the same in the game as in the movie - if not then they found a decent soundalike. The score is the intense, dramatic orchestral suite from the film, not the modern rock-tinged soundtrack that featured bands such as Linkin Park and Smashing Pumpkins. It fits the mood and pace of the game well.

RANDOM CLOSING THOUGHT

On the VHS home movie where we're all waiting to go trick-or-treating, Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" video is playing on MTV in the background. My dad tells me to go turn it off, but I don't hear him clearly through the Optimus mask, so I run over to the TV and turn it all the way up to 11. You can hear my dad yell "Off! Off!" before the tape cuts to Christmas '88.

Stunt Racer 64



Featured Game Review: By: Leatherrebel5150

BACK STORY

Stunt Racer 64 started its life as a game being developed by Boss Game Studios as a follow up to World Driver Championship, and was originally called Stunt Racer 3000. Those interested in the game during the time of its development could follow the progress on through Midway's developer diaries on their website. At one point it was published in these diaries that the title was cancelled would not be released. Then Stunt Racer was brought back to life and released in October of 2000, but with a catch it was released as a rental only.

THE GAME

The game takes place in a futuristic 1950's if that makes any sense. All the race tracks are suspended in the air by giant propellers as if the world is totally desolate below and



all of the cars have jets mounted to them in order to perform stunts. But the cars and characters are all straight from the 50's, pastel colors, slicked back hair and all.

In Stunt Racer 64 you take control of one of four racers; Gadgit, Dez, Trig, and Toad (who is a mutant alien frog thing), and each has their own starting vehicle. Depending on which character/car you choose determines your strengths in the beginning races such as speed, handling, etc. Your goal is to race through 5 leagues, each controlled by a boss racer who you must beat one on one to advance to the next league. Each boss and their respective leagues, is more challenging than the previous. But before you can even enter the leagues the game forces you to take a qualifying

round. In which you must complete 6 tasks in 60 seconds which include, jump through a money ring, reach 150mph, do a barrel roll to the right, back flip, get a 2x multiplier, and collect \$2000. Once you get beyond the qualifier you enter the leagues, each of which consists of series of races that you must qualify in to reach the next race and eventually the boss. Once you beat the boss you gain access to his car and the race track that was specific to the boss. But the boss cars cannot be upgraded.



Upgrading your car is essential to winning in Stunt Racer. Between each round you have the choice to upgrade your car with the money you earned during the race. Every car (except the boss cars and I believe the Interceptor) can be upgraded in 5 areas such as engine, turbo, handling, etc and each can be upgraded twice in each area. This also raises the value of the car, which is pointless since you cannot sell the cars; maybe this was a feature that was dropped in order to get the game out the door. You can also save your money to buy additional/better cars instead of upgrading your current one.

While you can get money by collecting coins littered about the track, most of your money will come from doing "stunts." I put that in quotes because there really are only 2 stunts you can perform, a back/front flip and a barrel roll. I think there might have been a spin move but I could not remember how to do it the last time I played. This does put a damper on the game as I would think with a name like Stunt Racer there would be more emphasis on things like stunts. It really does not matter which "stunt" you do you always get 200 coins per trick. The more tricks you perform in one jump the more coins you will get, but you lose coins based on your hang time. So you either want to perform more than one trick per jump, or wait until you're just about to land so that you do not lose many coins. While you're doing this in the race you also want to make sure you finish 1st because if you do not you lose a certain percentage of the coins you have earned.

Other than the standard races there are 2 stunt tracks in practice mode. One is the stunt bowl and the other is the half pipe. I would not recommend playing either of these

at all, besides the fact that there are only 2 stunts you can perform, both tracks are boring. The stunt bowl, while more interesting than the half pipe, has a lot of open space with a handful of good jumps and a pit in the middle you can fall down but that is it. The half pipe is just what it sounds like a giant half pipe. Well actually two of them in a cross shape. This one can real pain because you have to use your turbo to get up the wall and if you mess up more than two times then you're screwed because you will be out of turbo. So just avoid the stunt tracks.

CONTROLS

The controls in Stunt Racer 64 are very basic, A for gas, B for brake, and Z for turbo. Doing "stunts" is a little different than other racing games I've played. Instead of just moving the stick in a direction and turning or flipping that way, you must double tap the stick in that direction. It's not all that hard to do but sometimes it does not register especially if you don't return the stick to center before the second tap. This happens with stock and new joysticks for those who are wondering. While that is a bit of an annoyance I can live with it, however if you roll the car on the roof and need to



reset on the track you have to press the left shoulder button. This is a real pain; everything else is on the center or right handles of the controller and the right shoulder button is not used for anything so why not have used that one? While this is frustrating it is not a huge deal as you will not be using it very often. The C buttons are used for setting up the display to your preference and for switching to first person view.

GAMES CHALLENGE

Needless to say there is not much of a challenge in Stunt Racer. If you win the first league and make enough money doing stunts and collecting coins then you can easily get ahead of the racers in any given league by upgrading and purchasing new cars. Although the later boss races can get a little tricky if you screw up one too many times, but after learning their track it is cake. When it comes to the tracks themselves there is no challenge whatsoever. There are no real obstacles and very few tracks were you can fall off the

edge and you would have to fall off on purpose. All of the tracks are very easy to navigate because they tend to have sweeping turns, there are only two tracks I can think of that have sharp turns that require braking, most of the time you just let off the throttle. There are also a few tracks that have short cuts, they are not that necessary since you will almost always be way out ahead, but they are fun to go down just to change it up a bit.

GRAPHICS AND SOUND

Stunt Racer 64 does have really good graphics on the N64. Everything is very colorful and vibrant. One thing I noticed is that there is little to no pop up and no fog on the tracks, something that is really nice to have in an N64 title. The tracks themselves seem to be inspired by children's dreams. The things that are a part of the environment are very large and are a part of a theme. For example Soda Mountain has a frozen treat theme with giant candy canes, and giant hopping ice cream cones. While some of the things in the environment are impressive overall the tracks are very sparse, I would suspect this was done to allow for a better frame rate and I generally like it.

The music in Stunt Racer is nothing to make you want to blast your speakers. The music goes along with the environments, strange dream tunes. Think of it as similar the Rugrats Theme song, if any of you remember that cartoon. So it matches them game but it is just not spectacular. Same goes for the sound effects, very basic car sounds nothing that stands out.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall I really like this game because of its simplicity. Simple controls, simple tracks, simple concept. It makes it easy to just pick up and play and have fun. Out of the rental exclusive games for the N64 this is probably the best. I do wish there were more tracks in the game; there is only 12 total that are unevenly distributed through the leagues. The first league introduces 4 tracks; the next two leagues introduce 2 each, then 3 in the next league and 1 in the final league. If it were not for being a rental exclusive I could see them having all unique tracks for each league. But the tracks they do have are pretty trippy at times and fun to drive on even if they are sparse.

The only other complaint I really have is that there is not a lot of emphasis on the "stunts." They could have done a lot more in that department not only in the variety of actual tricks but where and when you could perform them. The way it is you can only perform tricks in specific spots where ramps are located. They could have made it so the track allows for more freedom on where to perform tricks. But overall I love this game it is not perfect but it is awesome, if you can get a hold of a cart I would highly recommend it.



FINAL GRADE



EZINE STAFF!

EDITOR IN CHIEF



SHANE7951

LAYOUT ARTIST



NATENDO

EXECUTIVE SUPERVISOR



DAIN

WRITERS!

STORE RELATIONS



COLE20200

PGRE



FERRIS-BUELLER

NOW PLAYING



THEMALRUSISAL

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



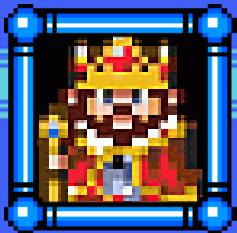
BURDGER

NES ARTISTRY



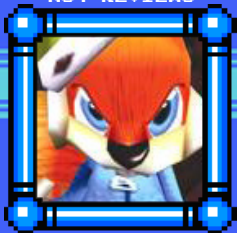
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MRFLUTTER-PIE

ARTISTS AND EDITORS!

EDITOR



NESGUY

EDITOR



ARCH_SNGEL

EDITOR



PATS1717

